

Story 747 1985 Tape 1

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Bekri Mustafa as Ferryman

Bekri Mustafa was a legendary swaggering person who lived during the later years of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup> He made his living as a ferryman on the Bosphorus. During his time, there was a renewed effort to prohibit the use of alcohol. In fact, the sultan of the time declared that he would have anyone beheaded who was convicted of drinking alcohol. Bekri Mustafa, however, was one drinker who continued to drink even after this very strict edict had been issued. This was reported to the sultan, but no one had any real evidence with which to prosecute him. Finally the sultan himself decided to investigate this situation.

*Dispute*  
5 The sultan and the grand vizier changed their usual clothes for the kind of clothes that other people wear. Then they went down along the Bosphorus and mingled among people along the waterfront. They were looking for Bekri Mustafa, and after a while they found him among the boatmen. The sultan said to him, "We want to cross the Bosphorus. Is

<sup>1</sup>Bekri Mustafa did not live during the late years of the Ottoman Empire but at its peak, during the time of Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640).

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your boat available for hire?"

Bekri Mustafa accepted their offer and prepared to take them across to the Asiatic side. The sultan and the vizier climbed into his boat, and Bekri began to row away from the dock. After he had rowed several minutes, he took in his oars and got out a bottle of wine and three glasses. He poured a glass of wine and handed it to the sultan. "Please, the customer first!" said Bekri Mustafa.

The sultan said, "No, no! There is an edict against alcoholic drinks by the sultan."

Bekri said, "Either you will drink this wine or you will have to walk on the water for the rest of the way." So the sultan had two possibilities: to drink the wine or be thrown out of the boat. Under those circumstances the sultan decided to drink the wine

Then Bekri offered a glass of wine to the vizier, but the vizier refused it: "No, there is a new law against alcohol. Someone would report us to the sultan, and we would be punished."

"No, there is nobody anywhere around us out here who could possibly see us. Either you must drink this wine or leave the boat right now!" The vizier decided to drink the wine, and Bekri himself then took a drink

Bekri Mustafa picked up his oars and began rowing again.

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After he had gone about one fourth the distance across the Bosphorus, he stopped and forced upon his customers another glass of wine apiece. This happened twice more before they reached the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus.

When they got there, the vizier could not restrain himself any longer. He said, "Look here, man, do you know who we are?"

"You are human beings, just like me, and right now you are also my customers."

"No, not just that!" the vizier continued. "I am the grand vizier, and this companion of mine is the sultan himself!"

Bekri responded, "Well, now I can see that the sultan was right in his edict against alcohol. Here you two have drunk only a few sips of wine, but already one of you thinks he is the grand vizier and the other thinks he is the sultan!"